

4

JOHN'S PREACHING, THE BAPTISM AND GENEALOGY OF JESUS LUKE 3:1-38

In the third chapter Luke introduced the preaching of John the Baptist and reported John's baptism of Jesus. It ends with the genealogy of Jesus.

The Preaching of John the Baptist — Luke 3:1-20

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness; ³and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways shall be made smooth;
 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

⁷He said therefore to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰And the multitudes asked him, "What then shall we do?" ¹¹And he answered them, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." ¹²Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" ¹³And he said to them, "Collect no more than is appointed you." ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

¹⁵As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, ¹⁶John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people. ¹⁹But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰added this to them all, that he shut up John in prison.

Luke sets his story in the political and religious history of the first century world. He views the coming of John the Baptist as a key turning-point in history. As Greek historians often did, Luke identified various officials as he dated the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry.

Alfred Plummer called attention to the significance of the ministry of John the Baptist.

A nation, which from Samuel to Malachi had scarcely ever been without a living oracle of God, had for three or four centuries never heard the voice of a Prophet. It seemed as if Jehovah had

withdrawn from His people. The breaking of this silence by the voice of John the Baptist caused a thrill through the whole Jewish population throughout the world. Luke shows his appreciation of the magnitude of the crisis by the six-fold attempt to give it an exact date . . . of Christian writers he is the first who tries to fit the Gospel history into the history of the world (p. 80).

William Barclay observed, "To Luke the emergence of John the Baptist was one of the hinges on which history turned" (*Luke*, p. 26).

3:1-2. Luke began with the Roman Empire, then listed local governors. It is difficult to decide if the fifteen year reign of Tiberias, the second Roman emperor, is to be dated from A.D. 11 when Tiberias became co-regent with Augustus or A.D. 14 when he became emperor after Augustus' death. The earlier date would point to A.D. 30 for the death of Christ, the latter toward A.D. 33 as the date of Christ's death.

Pilate was governor of Judea, A.D. 26 to A.D. 36. After Herod the Great's death in 4 B.C. his son Archelaus ruled Judea. He was so oppressive that Rome deposed him and set up rule by Rome-appointed governors over Judea. Pilate was the fifth such governor. Final jurisdiction in Jesus' trials fell to Pilate.

Herod Antipas was the Tetrarch of Galilee. This son of Herod the Great ruled Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. This Herod appears in Luke's Gospel in the following references — 3:19; 9:7; 13:31ff; 23:6ff. *Tetrarch* originally meant ruler of the fourth of an area but came to mean a petty ruler subject to a higher ruler.

Philip was a half-brother of Herod Antipas (not the Philip of Mark 6:14-29). Philip was Tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis (northeast of Galilee) from 4 B.C. to A.D. 34. He developed the city called Caesarea Philippi.

Lysanias was Tetrarch of Abilene, a small region north, northeast of Galilee in Lebanon. Lysanias' rule has been questioned by some critics but has been confirmed by an inscription. Neither Lysanias nor the above Philip otherwise figure in the gospel story.

Luke also lists Jewish religious officials — "the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. Annas was the high priest from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15. Even after he was deposed, many Jews continued to recognize him as high priest. The Romans recognized Annas' son-in-law Caiaphas from about A.D. 18 to A.D. 36. Jesus appeared before both Annas and Caiaphas at His trials (Matt. 26:3; John 11:49ff; 18:13f;

see also Acts 4:6).

Critics have said that Luke was incorrect in identifying both Annas and Caiaphas as high priest. Even though deposed, Annas exercised considerable power during Caiaphas' high priesthood. Geldenhuys stated that Luke's uncommon expression "Annas and Caiaphas being high priest" (singular and not plural), indicates the real state of affairs: although the Romans had deposed Annas, and Caiaphas was the official high priest, Annas nevertheless in reality still exercised some high-priestly authority (p. 135).

John's public ministry began either in A.D. 26 or 29, probably A.D. 26. In this dark period of history God sent a new prophet to be the herald for the Messiah. This expression is used in the Old Testament to express divine inspiration (I Sam. 15:10; II Sam. 7:4; etc.). God commissioned and inspired John to preach as the forerunner preparing for the Messiah. The promises of Luke 1:14-17 and 1:76-79 were fulfilled.

3:3. Matthew said John was preaching in "the wilderness of Judea" (Matt. 3:1). John preached in the vicinity of the Jordan River, which was important as a place for immersion.

John preached judgment on the nation of Israel, repentance, baptism and announcement of the coming Kingdom. The Jews were familiar with ceremonial washings. Many hold that in the first century the Jews practiced proselyte baptism, the baptism of Gentile converts to Judaism. In this case John was shocking the Jews by asking them also to be baptized.

Others contend that since the sources about Jewish proselyte baptism are third or fourth century A.D. the practice may have been derived from Christianity. In this case John would have been the first to baptize.

In preparation for the coming Savior John demanded repentance — a change of mind toward God, away from self rule. This decision to surrender to the will of God involves turning from sin and submitting to a life of obedience to God.

John's baptism was "for the forgiveness of sin." It was not a baptism into Christ (Romans 6:3-6) because Christ obviously had not died. The Old Testament sacrifices were promisory notes on salvation, paid in full and made effective by the death of Christ. John's baptism was for the purpose of forgiveness of sins, yet, those who received John's baptism were still in need of being baptized into Christ to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-5; see also Acts 2:38; 5:32).

3:4-6. John's work of preparing the way for Christ was predicted

by the Old Testament prophets Malachi (3:1; 4:5-6) and Isaiah (40:3-5). Luke quoted Isaiah's words, "Just as Oriental monarchs, when making a royal progress, send a courier before them to exhort the population to prepare roads, so the Messiah sends His herald to exhort His own people (John 1:11) to prepare their hearts for His coming" (Plummer, p. 87).

John did not bring the final message. Jesus was the Word, the message of God to man. John was a Voice announcing the coming of the Word and through his preaching of repentance and baptism prepared men and women to receive Jesus as Messiah. As roads were made where none existed and bad roads made better when the king was coming, John's preaching paved the way for Christ. The quotation from Isaiah also underscored Luke's theme of salvation through Christ available to all human beings.

3:7-9. Luke gave us a summary of what John the Baptist was in the habit of preaching when crowds came out of towns and villages into the wilderness to be immersed by him. John used several figures drawn from the wilderness — vipers, stones and barren trees. John called them offspring of serpents. In Matthew's Gospel this language was directed to the Pharisees.

Baptism alone was not fire insurance against the impending judgment of God. John called them to genuine repentance as well. Salvation is for those who repent and accept the Messiah; God's wrath will fall on those who reject the Messiah. John wanted evidence of repentance, not mere words professing repentance. He told them not even to begin to have the thought in their mind that they were secure because they could trace their ancestry back to Abraham. John reminded them if they did not live as true children of God, God could raise up true children of Abraham from the stones lying on the ground there in the wilderness. Repentance is an urgent matter because God's certain judgment was impending and would not be long postponed.

3:10-14. Those in the crowd continually asked John what they needed to do to bring forth fruits befitting repentance. The word translated *coat* is the undershirt (tunic) and not the indispensable outer cloak. Those with food need to share with the hungry.

The tax collectors (publicans) were Jews who collected taxes for Rome or for Herod. "The Jews especially abhorred them as blood-suckers for a heathen conqueror. For a Jew to enter such a service was the most utter degradation. He was excommunicated and his whole family was regarded as disgraced" (Plummer, p. 91). Since it was common for tax collectors to dishonestly extort more money for

themselves. John told them to collect no more than the tax due.

Those doing military service were Jewish soldiers, perhaps police. John told them they were not to take money from people through force, intimidation or false accusation. John did not tell them it was wrong to be a soldier. What a needed lesson for today — “Be content with your wages.”

John’s answer to their question, “What must we do?” was not some special, great act but rather to show genuine love for their fellow man.

3:15-18. John was so remarkable that the crowd wondered if perhaps he was the Christ, the Messianic redeemer prophesied in the Old Testament. (See John 1:20.) Luke said he answered “all,” indicating how widespread this opinion was.

In answering the question in their hearts John humbly contrasted his baptism and its importance with Jesus’ baptism with the Holy Spirit. John baptized with water but no mention is made of the Holy Spirit with his baptism (Acts 2:38; 19:1-8). John did not feel worthy to be the slave who unfastened the sandals of the One mightier than himself who was coming. It is a great virtue of John that he recognized his subordinate role and pointed away from himself to Jesus.

Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Some take the fire to refer to the purifying grace; however, it may well refer to the final judgment of the unrepentant in hell (II Thess. 1:7-8; Rev. 20:11-15).

John used a figure from the threshing floor. They would take a forked shovel and throw up the grain so that the wind would blow away the chaff, which would be burned. The grain was then carried to the barn.

Christ’s coming would separate the believer from the unbeliever, those truly repentant from the unrepentant. For those who reject Christ there awaits an eternal hell (Mark 9:46; Matt. 25:46; Rev. 14:9-11).

John had preached the bad news of judgment. He did not neglect the good news of forgiveness through the coming Redeemer.

3:19-20. Herod Antipas, ruler over Galilee and Perea had stolen Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip, a private citizen. Herod divorced his wife, the daughter of Aretas, and married Herodias. John the Baptist courageously and repeatedly rebuked Herod for this wrong and for his sinful life.

Herod put John in prison at Machaerus, near the Dead Sea. John was later beheaded at the instigation of Herodias (Luke 9:7-9; Mark

6:20). Josephus told of the ministry of John the Baptist and of his imprisonment and beheading by Herod (*Antiquities*, xviii,5,2). Josephus said Herod imprisoned John because he feared John would start an insurrection. This is the reason he publicly gave for the imprisonment. Luke gave us the real reason.

The Baptism of Jesus — Luke 3:21-22

²¹Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased."

Jesus began his public life by submitting in obedience to the Word of God announced by John the Baptist. Matthew (3:13-17) and Mark (1:9-11) gave more details about Jesus' baptism. Since Jesus had no need for repentance or forgiveness of sin, John saw no need of baptism for Jesus. Jesus confessed no need for baptism in this sense but he submitted to baptism "for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Jesus was obedient in baptism to the righteous will of God as an act of humble submission.

3:21. Some think that this verse means Jesus' baptism was private with no others present. Luke may mean that many of the Jews had already been baptized by John before Jesus came to be baptized. Or he may mean that Jesus was the last to be baptized that day having waited for the others to be baptized.

Luke is the only Gospel writer to state that Jesus was praying when He was baptized. Luke recorded many instances of prayer in Jesus' life: 5:15-16; 6:12; 9:18,28; 10:21; 11:1; 22:32,42; 23:34,46; 24:30.

It is difficult to comprehend the statement "the heaven was opened," however, it is doubtful that it refers to atmospheric conditions. Perhaps it means to convey that God was communicating from heaven through a divine manifestation and message.

3:22. Upon this occasion God sent a visible manifestation of His approval of Jesus and His work. The invisible Spirit came in this visible way, "in bodily form, as a dove." This does not mean that Jesus did not have the Holy Spirit before his baptism, because He possessed the Spirit without limitation. But now through this manifestation Jesus is publicly set apart to begin His work as Messiah. It was a sign promised to John the Baptist verifying that Jesus was the Lamb of

God and the Son of God (John 1:29-34).

God's voice identified Jesus as His unique and loved Son, thus affirming Jesus' deity and God's approval of all Jesus said and did. When a repentant believer submits to Christ's rule through baptism he receives the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and is declared to be a child of God having put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).

The Genealogy of Jesus — Luke 3:23-38

²³Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, ²⁴the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, ²⁴the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, ²⁶the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, ²⁷the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, ²⁸the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, ²⁹the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, ³⁰the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, ³¹the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, ³²the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, ³³the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, ³⁴the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, ³⁵the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, ³⁶the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, ³⁷the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, ³⁸the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

3:23-38. A young boy called the genealogies the "Skip-its." He could not pronounce the names so he read it "Skip-it" begat "Skip-it." Some people when reading the Gospel feel they should skip this section. What value can it have for us today?

The two genealogies of Jesus (Matt. 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38) teach several significant lessons.

The faithfulness of God is demonstrated. God keeps His word. He brought to fulfillment what He promised to Abraham, Moses, David

and to all the prophets. History from the beginning of time has prepared for and led up to the coming of Christ.

The genealogies also show that Jesus identified Himself with humanity. Some notorious sinners are included in Jesus' family history. His human heritage could not account for the sinlessness and divine character of Jesus. Even though He was divine, yet He identified Himself with us by becoming a man and had fellowship with men.

Some have said that Herod the Great destroyed all genealogies of Jewish families. Plummer said even if Herod did make such an order many private records would have been concealed (p. 102). Josephus, writing near the end of the first century after Christ, gave his genealogy "as he found it in the public records" (*Life*, I). It is evident from this statement that not all public records were destroyed. Mary may have supplied the family history to Luke.

3:23. Luke is the only gospel writer to record Jesus' age at the beginning of His public career. Jesus was about thirty years of age when He began His ministry. Luke's expression is not meant to be exact. "About thirty" could include up to two years more or less.

Plummer commented, "Being the son (as was supposed of Joseph) of Heli; i.e. being supposed to be the son of Joseph, but being really the grandson of Heli" (p. 103). In the original language the name *Joseph* is without an article indicating it is outside the genealogical series proper. The word *begat* is used to refer to the relationship of a father to his son, to a grandson, a son-in-law, or a levirate son. If Luke is giving the family history through Mary, then Heli was Mary's father, father-in-law of Joseph.

3:24-38. Matthew's genealogy goes back to Abraham. To convince Jews concerning the Messiahship of Jesus it was sufficient to establish that Jesus was the son of David and the son of Abraham. Luke's genealogy traced the ancestry back to Adam. This approach would have more meaning to a non-Jewish reader.

Although scholars are not all agreed, the best explanation is that Matthew traced the real descent of Joseph, thus giving legal and kingly genealogy. Jesus was a legitimate heir to the throne of David and, though He did not owe His physical origin to an earthly father, Joseph was His legal father because he was married to Jesus' mother. Matthew's record fits his purpose of establishing the Messiahship of Jesus in the mind of Jews.

Luke, in addressing a non-Jewish audience, gave the actual descent of Jesus through Mary back to Adam, thus linking Jesus with the

whole human race. This contributed to Luke's purpose of showing Jesus as Savior of mankind. Jesus is akin to Gentile as well as Jew. We can all claim Him as a brother.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How is 3:1-2 unique among the gospels?
2. What are the two possible dates for the beginning of the rule of Tiberias?
3. When was Pilate governor of Judea?
4. Define tetrarch.
5. Could Annas and Caiphas both be high priests at the same time? Explain the problem and suggest a solution.
6. Why was it a new thing for John to ask Jews to be baptized?
7. What does the text mean that John's baptism was "for forgiveness of sins"?
8. How does the preparing of roads for a monarch relate to the work of John the Baptist?
9. How were Jews who became tax collectors viewed by fellow Jews?
10. What did John the Baptist say about wages?
11. What are two possible meanings of baptism "with fire"?
12. What had Herod Antipas done that called forth a rebuke from John the Baptist?
13. How does Josephus' explanation of John's imprisonment differ from the Gospel record?
14. Why did John the Baptist think Jesus did not need baptism?
15. Why did Jesus need to be baptized?
16. What does Luke say Jesus was doing when He was baptized?
17. What sign did God give John the Baptist verifying Jesus as the Son of God?
18. What lessons can be learned from the genealogies?
19. How old was Jesus when He began His ministry?
20. Matthew traced the ancestry of Jesus through Mary or Joseph?
21. Luke traced the ancestry of Jesus through Mary or Joseph?
22. How does tracing the genealogy back to Adam fit the theme of Luke's Gospel?